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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON ISRAEL'S ASSASSINATION OF
HAMAS' SHEIKH YASSIN

Summary

-- Jordanian papers published today, March 23, are almost in their entirety dedicated to Israel's assassination of Hamas' Sheikh Ahmad Yassin. Front pages carry extensive reports highlighting the Arab people's "anger", the Palestinian "promise of vengeance" and the international reaction. Front pages also focus on Jordan's official reaction as stated by King Abdullah, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the government's official spokesperson. Front pages also highlight the demonstrations that took place around Jordan condemning the assassination. Reports carry the U.S. official reaction to the assassination, highlighting remarks made by the U.S. National Security Advisor and the White House spokesman. Entire inside pages are dedicated to reports about Sheikh Yassin's life, details of reactions from members of the local and international community as well as demonstrations in Arab countries denouncing the assassination. The majority of commentaries in today's paper strongly denounce Israel, and Sharon in particular, for the assassination. Most declare the demise and the meaninglessness of any peace efforts with Israel.

Editorial Commentary

-- "Assassinating peace"

Chief Editor Taher Udwan writes on the back page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (03/23): "The Arab people are waiting for revenge against Israel in retaliation for the crime of assassinating Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, which means the anticipation of a martyrdom operation in the streets of occupied Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. This reaction by the people is not only expressed among Palestinians, but also among the broad swaths of the Arab people.. Sharon's actions, crimes, assassinations and walls are the main source for hatred and grudges and the feeder for the spirit of violence and the desire for vengeance that beats in the heart of every Arab. If revenge against Sharon's crimes comes by means of a martyrdom operation that would be called terrorism in Washington, then this 'terrorism' has earned popular support. It has become not just a religious and patriotic ideology but rational logic to declare that if you are surrounded by a criminal who wants to kill you, destroy your home and wipe out your people, then what is left to you but turn your body into bomb? Sharon is not a man of peace, as described by the sponsor of his crimes, President Bush, neither is he qualified to be a partner in any peace process. This criminal . is today more dangerous, not because he doubled the amount of bloodshed, but because he has supporters among the Israelis and because behind him stands the American occupation force with its big armies in Iraq and the Gulf. Assassinating the Sheikh is the assassination of peace and declaration that the peace process with Israel has reached a dead end and that the conflict has gone back to the original slogan: a conflict about survival not of borders."

-- "Going back to the negotiating table: is this still an option for the Palestinian Authority and the Arab political regime?"

Analyst Samih Ma'aytah writes on the inside page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (03/23): "One of the most superficial analyses is the one that says that Sharon directed the assassination [of Sheikh Yassin] as a message to the Arab summit scheduled in a few days. Sharon, like the Arab people on the street, does not care about such Arab protocols. He knows that they are nothing more than a political market to practice speech and rhetoric.

There is one issue on Sharon's agenda and that is to implement his security program that is based on criminality and killing. He is not concerned with any noise about it, because the key lies in the hands of Washington, which is dealing the order of the day to capitals.. The major story is not the martyrdom of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, but the conviction that some within the Palestinian Authority maintain that negotiations remain necessary and must resume, as if what happened to Sheikh Yassin was a car accident and not a criminal aggression, as if what Sharon is doing on daily basis does not indicate the fact that he has turned his back to everything related to settlement. Sharon, who killed the Sheikh and kills the people of Palestine every day, is not concerned with political reactions. He knows that his aggressive security program has an easy path towards implementation.

After what the Sharon government has carried out over the past years, it is a political requirement for the Palestinian Authority and the Arab political establishments to find an answer to the question 'what's the alternative?' This question tells the Palestinian and Arab decision-makers to stop the meaningless rhetoric about resuming negotiations and reviving the roadmap and other initiatives. What do these decision-makers have to say to the people after more than ten years of negotiations, agreements and dialogues?"

-- "Sheikh Yassin's assassination and the illusions of peace"

Daily columnist Ibrahim Al-Absi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/23): "After the assassination of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the founder of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, and its spiritual leader - under the direct and declared supervision of the butcher of Sabra and Shatilla and the prominent racist, fascist and blood-thirsty leader in the Zionist entity, Ariel Sharon - there is no more room for illusions of peace and peace projects and peace initiatives with this Zionist entity. Moreover, there is nothing more that Washington can hide behind in talking about terrorism and terrorists, when it, itself, was party to committing this very ugly crime when it gave Sharon the green light to assassinate Sheikh Yassin by virtue of the fact that it did not add to its reaction anything other than call on the Palestinians to exercise restrain and calm, as if it is telling them to die silently and quietly and to restrain themselves as they are being slaughtered."

-- "The assassination crime and its role in American Israeli schemes"

Daily columnist George Haddad writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/23): "This almost complete congruency between American and Israeli schemes for the Middle East region is no secret. Therefore, any serious and genuine reading of the situation and these developments would be incomplete, in fact wrong, if it does not take this alliance into consideration. Everything that Israel is doing at this stage is being done in consultation and in coordination with its biggest ally, the United States, and of course this ally is not going to approve any Israeli action that is not in line with its own schemes. All the talk and the statements mean nothing. A major operation that entails serious repercussions such as assassinating Sheikh Ahmad Yassin cannot happen without the prior approval of America. As for the statement of the White House and that of the National Security Advisor Rice denying knowledge of or approval for the operation, they mean nothing. A question then poses itself: why would the Americans approve an operation that they know very well would have costly repercussions and would not serve to calm things down and move towards peace? The answer is simply that the operation, with its repercussions, plays a role in redirecting and developing events regionally and thus can be used to bring out American schemes that aim at redrawing a new map for the region, where American interests are secure."

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